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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [MOPS](#) [SU](#)  
SUBJECT: TENSIONS FLARE IN JEBEL MARRA AS KEY REBEL COMMANDER KILLED  
IN INFIGHTING

REF: KHARTOUM 1357

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The internal struggle within the Sudan Liberation Army/Abdul Wahid (SLA/AW) rebel faction reignited on January 5, when a prominent commander was killed in an ambush, according to UN and rebel sources. Abdalla Bakr, who had actively advanced the Doha rebel unification process supported by U.S. Special Envoy to Sudan (SE) Scott Gration, was reportedly killed by other members of SLA/AW who remain faithful to the Paris-based leader. Meanwhile in West Darfur, a local Government of Sudan (GOS) military commander told a United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) investigative patrol that GOS forces had clashed with fighters from the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) near Sileah on January 6-8. Neither side reported casualties. End Summary.

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PROMINENT COMMANDER KILLED IN JEBEL MARRA  
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¶2. (SBU) According to rebel and UN sources, on January 5 SLA/AW Commander Abdalla Bakr and 25 soldiers had traveled to the village of Boldon (about 5 km from Golul) where they arrested SLA/AW Chief of Military Intelligence Younis Desoung at the order of SLA/AW General Commander Gaddura. (Note: Younis, a relative of Abdul Wahid, is said to oppose the Doha rebel unification process supported by SE Gration. Tensions have flared within SLA/AW between those who favor rebel unification efforts and greater engagement with the international community, and those who oppose them. End Note.)

¶3. (SBU) On the way back from Boldon, Bakr and his soldiers were reportedly ambushed in the vicinity of Golul (about 15 km east of Nertiti), West Darfur. Abdalla Bakr was killed in the ambush. One of the attackers was also killed in action while another, along with Younis, managed to escape. Relatives of Abdul Wahid are believed to be responsible for the killing, according to SLA/AW Commander Osman Tawilla. (Note: This was apparently the second attempt on Bakr's life in recent weeks; in late December he was unsuccessfully ambushed in Boldon by an SLA/AW commander named Dugosh, who is now reportedly detained by the pro-unification group. Bakr was also abducted by persons loyal to Abdul Wahid in late November (reftel) and subsequently released. End Note.) According to UN sources, tensions in the region are high and the security situation remains unpredictable.

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JEM CLASHES WITH GOS IN WEST DARFUR  
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¶4. (SBU) On January 9, UNAMID conducted a patrol to the town of Sileah (about 25 km from the Chad-Sudan border) to investigate media reports, attributed to JEM, that GOS aircraft had dropped bombs in the area. According to UNAMID, a local sheikh told the patrol that on January 2, GOS aircraft dropped bombs near Umdaraba village, about 17 km from Sileah town, for unknown reasons. The patrol also met with the local GOS commander, who stated that on January 2 JEM forces were spotted moving towards Sileah town and were disrupted by GOS aircraft. The GOS commander further stated that on January 6, JEM forces were seen moving along Aresa Jebel Mountain (7 km from Sileah) and upon spotting the movement, GOS military forces launched an attack. Clashes continued on January 8 when JEM forces advanced towards a GOS military barracks in Sileah, he said, and JEM's movement was halted. No casualties were reported by either side, according to UNAMID.

¶5. (SBU) Comment: The killing of Abdalla Bakr will likely deepen

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divisions within the SLA/AW. If Abdul Wahid loyalists lose military influence in Jebel Marra, the Paris-based leader may face increasing pressure to join the Doha talks, set to start on January 24. On the other hand, the death of Abdalla Bakr weakens the hand of the pro-unification group led by SLA/AW General Commander Gaddura, further compounded by the continued detainment of his Chief of Staff Yousif Ahmed Yousif (known as Karjakola) by JEM forces in Chad. The presence of JEM troops in West Darfur, meanwhile, could indicate the rebel movement is slowly being pushed out of Chad, a confidence-building measure in the nascent Chad-Sudan rapprochement. (Alternatively, the mobilization could be seen as attempt to gain territory and thus leverage in advance of planned peace talks in Doha on January 24). Either way, JEM appears to be growing weaker; in addition to suffering heavy losses from May 2009 fighting in Dar Zaghawa, JEM is said to be struggling to retain the loyalty of various former SLA commanders who joined it following the April 2009 defection of Suleiman Jamous from SLA/Unity.  
WHITEHEAD